

# To heal the wounds

## Diocesan policy handles violations of sacred trust

By BISHOP MATTHEW H. CLARK

The recent arrest of the Rev. Eugene Eno, a priest of the Diocese of Rochester, on the misdemeanor charge of sexual abuse in the second degree has prompted some questions.

Among them:

- Is the diocese doing its job in dealing with this case and with the problem of sexual abuse or exploitation in general?

- What is the diocese doing to prevent this kind of conduct?

- How will the diocese help the community deal with the feelings of shock, anger and confusion to which such behavior gives rise?

These questions are appropriate and fairly asked. It is my hope the following comments will be helpful.

1. Determining the validity of the legal charges brought against Father Eno is up to the court. Until a ruling is obtained, he is entitled to the presumption of innocence enjoyed by any citizen in like circumstances.

At the same time, when such allegations are made, our diocesan policy governing such matters calls for the removal from ministry of the accused person at least until such time as the matter is resolved.

We do this for the protection of the community, which is our first priority.

2. We published the policy to which I have just referred in July 1993. It received a good deal of attention at the time. Since then, we have followed it carefully when allegations have arisen and have done so in the current instance.

3. Our policy is based on the premise that sexual abuse, harassment and exploitation by any church worker are contrary to Christian principles and harmful to victims, families and communities. Conduct of this type is not and will not be tolerated. Abuse of minors or vulnerable adults is especially destructive and reprehensible.



File illustration

**I apologize to anybody who has experienced this kind of injury at the hands of a person exercising ministry in the name of the church.**

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4. The following procedures are followed when an allegation is received:

- Prompt response to all allegations.

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We have designated Barbara Pedeville and Father Robert Ring as intake workers to receive such allegations and to initiate the follow-up process.

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If you have any concerns in this regard, please call the diocese at (716) 328-3210.

- If the allegation is supported by sufficient evidence, the person accused is relieved promptly of his or her duties.

When appropriate, the alleged offender is referred for appropriate medical evaluation and possible interventions.

- We comply with the obligations of civil law requiring the reporting of incidents and cooperate with any legal investigations.

We inform victims of their rights under the law.

- We reach out to victims and their families and offer assistance for their physical, spiritual and emotional well-being.

In some cases, professional counseling is provided at diocesan expense.

- With respect for the privacy of the individuals involved, we try to communicate as openly as possible with members of the community and the media.

- Where appropriate, we provide crisis counseling for the community.

- It can happen that an offender, through treatment, experiences healing and conversion and is recommended for restoration to ministry by those who treated him or her.

In such instances, we consult with professional advisers about whether we should do that or not, and, if we do, what limitations, if any, will be placed on the minister. In such cases, we inform the victim and pastor or other supervisor of the new situation.

I conclude these comments with an apology to any and all persons who have ever experienced this kind of injury at the hands of a person exercising ministry in the name of the church.

If your trust has been violated in this way and we can help you come to the peace and reconciliation, please let me know. □

*Clark is bishop of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Rochester.*